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Man gets 10 years in prison for child pornography



BY DAVID ASHENFELTER • FREE PRESS STAFF WRITER • JUNE 16, 2008

A former Dexter businessman with a history of sexual assaults was sentenced today in federal court to a mandatory 10 years in prison for possession of child pornography.

U.S. District Judge David Lawson imposed the sentence on Thomas Walter Vanbuhler, 60, who was arrested and indicted in May 2007 after U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement agents found 109 images of child porn on his home computer. The charges resulted from a federal crackdown on child pornography.

Vanbuhler, who once owned a Livonia company that manufactured machine controls, became a target after subscribing to a child smut website in 2003, authorities said. They said he previously was sentenced to probation after pleading no contest to fondling child in 2002. The next year, he violated probation by molesting another child, but his sentence remained unchanged, authorities said.

Vanbuhler pleaded guilty in U.S. District Court last August to possession of child pornography.

His lawyer, Mark Kriger of Detroit, urged Lawson not to consider the earlier conviction in setting Vanbuhler's sentence because he had pleaded no contest in the prior case. Assistant U.S. Attorney Leonid Feller persuaded Lawson to consider the earlier case, which exposed Vanbuhler to a 10-year mandatory minimum prison sentence rather than 37-47 months in prison.

Vanbuhler has been in custody since his arrest.

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June 16, 2008

'Don't do anything silly'

Trace Christenson
The Enquirer

MARSHALL — A Farwell man was arrested here on Father's Day as he attempted to meet a 13-year-old girl for sex.

James Young III, 34, was arrested in a McDonald's restaurant in Marshall about 11:30 a.m. Sunday.

He had just placed an order and a clerk was about to hand him his change when Detective Guy Picketts of the Calhoun County Sheriff Department stepped next to him and said, "Hi, Jim, put your hands on the counter and don't do anything silly."

Young is expected to be arraigned today in Calhoun County District Court on at least two charges of enticing a child for immoral purposes and using a computer to commit a crime.

Picketts said Young is married and the father of three children; he has just taken a new job as business manager of an Iowa print shop.

Members of Perverted Justice, an online Web site that trains people to search the Internet for sexual predators, first began corresponding with Young in a chat room about three weeks ago, Picketts said. Young believed he was chatting with a 13-year-old girl who was willing to meet him for sex, Picketts said..

Young had proposed meeting the girl at the McDonald's on Friday evening and spending the night in a hotel before he went home to the small town north of Mount Pleasant for the Father's Day weekend.

Officers from the sheriff department, Marshall police, Battle Creek police and the FBI were ready to intercept him then, but Young was delayed by bad weather. He did stay in a Marshall motel Friday night, Picketts said, but the person who was pretending to be the girl said she couldn't wait so late.

Young then proposed meeting her Sunday and staying overnight in a Marshall motel before he returned to Iowa.

Sgt. Dan Latta said Perverted Justice had sent Young a picture of a young girl, pretending she was the girl in Marshall.

Deputies then found a 17-year-old Marshall girl who matched the description and she was waiting inside the restaurant when Young arrived.

In prearranged chats, Young had instructed her not to speak to him but to walk to his car when he came into the restaurant. They had exchanged clothing descriptions before the meeting.

Picketts said Young walked into the restaurant, spotted the girl and then as she stood up and began to walk out, he went to the counter.

The girl walked out of the restaurant where undercover officers were waiting in unmarked cars as Picketts arrested Young inside the restaurant.

Officers were expected to execute a search warrant on Young's car and at his home, searching for evidence in the case.

The case is the second investigated by the sheriff department and Perverted Justice.

In February of 2007, a 47-year-old Wixom man was arrested when he walked into an Albion restaurant expecting to meet and later to have sex with a 13-year-old.

That man, Richard Wright, 49, is serving a five- to 20-year sentence.

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Prosecutor outlines case in old slaying trial

Witness bolsters claim of birthday party ruse by Ream

By Jameson Cook
Macomb Daily Staff Writer

A Macomb assistant prosecutor continued building a case against a 59-year-old man accused of killing a 13-year-old Eastpointe girl 22 years ago with damaging testimony from a former co-worker, a jailhouse snitch, an ex-wife and the detective in charge.

Murder defendant Arthur Ream allegedly lured a 13-year-old girl to a meeting with him at a Dairy Queen on Nine Mile Road in Eastpointe on April, 20, 1986, by telling her he would take her to a birthday party for his son, Scott.

But Gary Schellenbarger, who worked as a subcontracting carpet installer under Ream, testified Friday in Macomb County Circuit Court that Scott was not even in Michigan that day, as Scott traveled with him for a 10-day trip in Texas. They left by airplane April 18.

Ream actually forced Schellenbarger to take Scott with him, saying he wouldn't allow him to miss work for a week with pay unless he took Scott, Schellenbarger told assistant Macomb Prosecutor Steven Kaplan under questioning. Schellenbarger, 28 at the time, needed to travel to Texas to wrap up matters related to him moving from Texas to Michigan.

Confirming that trip Friday was Linda Bronson, the first of Ream's three ex-wives. Bronson had divorced Ream in the late 1970s and had custody of Scott until he chose to live with his father, who had been residing at the Roseville carpet warehouse he operated. He was separated from his third ex-wife, who lived in Harrison Township.

Bronson said she was livid about the trip because Scott, who was 14, would miss a week of school.

"I was very upset," Bronson testified. "I called the Friend of the Court and they told me I couldn't stop him. I was very unhappy."

She also was upset about Scott deciding to live with his father, who didn't enforce rules, she said.

"That was a choice Scott made in the judge's chambers," she said. "I vehemently fought it."

Bronson also noted that Scott's birthday was in January, not April, as Ream had allegedly indicated to his alleged victim.

Scott died in a July 4, 1994, car crash.

Ream, who has been twice convicted for sexually assaulting young girls, is charged with first-degree murder even though the victim's body has never been found and Kaplan is relying on circumstantial evidence, albeit a large amount.

The jury will not hear about the prior convictions, based on Judge Mary Chrzanowski's ruling.

Defense attorney Timothy Kohler has tried to show that Cindy could still be alive and ran away from home. But several of her family members and relatives have said they staunchly believe she is gone, even though they still look for her and hope she will appear someday.

Kohler on Friday sought to raise the possibility Cindy may have been involved in drugs, which could lead to an alternate reason for her being missing. Kohler pointed to speculation in a 1994 written police statement by one of her aunts, Karen Hoeft. But Hoeft, who lived two blocks away from Cindy and her father and saw Cindy frequently, pulled back from that speculation Friday, only noting that Cindy was at an age where she wanted to "spread her wings." Her speculation to police was eight years after Cindy disappeared.

"It was something that somebody might have said to me," she said. "It was nothing that I personally seen."

She noted that Cindy in the months before she disappeared started "wanting to become a teenager" and began using makeup and showing interest in boys.

"She was a great kid. I still love her and miss her," she said.

Cindy knew Ream through Scott Ream, whom she met at the Macomb Mall in Roseville and was interested in as a possible boyfriend.

Testifying on Thursday was Shane Enser, Ream's cellmate at West Shoreline Correctional Facility in Muskegon County. Enser said he asked Ream about his trial in Macomb. Ream responded by saying "he was going to trial because he killed someone. Those were his exact words."

Ream had been in prison since 1998 after he was convicted of third-degree criminal sexual conduct for having sex with a girl between 13 and 15 years old in Gladwin County.

For the current trial, Ream has been transferred to the Macomb Correctional Facility in Lenox Township.

The officer in charge of the case, Eastpointe Detective Derek MacLaughlin, testified Thursday about an interview he had with Ream in May 2007.

"I told Art that you took Cindy and raped her and killed her and put her in the van and buried her," he said. MacLaughlin said he then asked where he put her body.

"He stated to me he couldn't tell me because that would wreck his defense,"

MacLaughlin testified.

MacLaughlin said he told Ream "he needs to give the Zarzycki family some closure" like Ream had with his son, Scott. "I believe he said he couldn't because it was the principle of the thing," MacLaughlin said.

MacLaughlin also testified that in 2007 police searched Ream's old carpet warehouse and found a flier the family had passed out, saying, "Have you seen Cindy Zarzycki?" The flier had two photos of Cindy, one a portrait and one in her softball uniform, and was found in a men's jewelry box.

Kaplan through questioning implied Ream kept it as a "memento" of the incident.

"Why would he have this?" Kaplan asked rhetorically outside the courtroom.

MacLaughlin also noted that police found Ream's phone records from the 1980s and noticed something unusual. Ream kept all the records from 1981 through 1988 but excluded records from 1986, when he talked to her on the phone, Kaplan said.

Ream didn't become a person of interest in the case until 1994, when then-Detective Danielle Davis began looking into it around the same time the family held a candlelight vigil.

Davis for the first time learned from a friend of Cindy's that Cindy planned to meet Ream at the Dairy Queen between 9 and 11 a.m. on Sunday, April 20, as Ream told her he would take her to a surprise birthday party for Scott. Cindy talked to Ream from a friend's house the night before.

Davis retired in 1995, and MacLaughlin took over the case, working on it on and off over the years. MacLaughlin in 2005 gained an independent confirmation of Ream's alleged birthday party ruse from a second of Cindy's girlfriends.

Cindy had told Theresa (nee Brash) Olechowski, who testified Thursday, about the planned meeting with Ream and asked her to come with her because she expressed some apprehension about meeting Ream, Olechowski said. But Olechowski told her that her mother wouldn't allow her to go with Cindy.

Cindy's brother, Ed Jr., testified this week that he saw Cindy walking away from their Roslyn Street home toward Nine Mile and wanted to go with his sister. But Cindy told him to go away, he said.

Cindy had misled her father, Ed, about who she was going to meet. She told him she was meeting a girlfriend at the Dairy Queen and they would proceed to go to church.

MacLaughlin's efforts were bolstered by the formation of the prosecutor's office cold case unit in 2005.

The trial is scheduled to continue Tuesday.



June 14, 2008

Man gets 50-75 years for hit-and-run death

Trace Christenson
The Enquirer

The joy was gone because of Arenza Hubbard.

"Ebony Lee was my cousin," Todd Artis told Calhoun County Circuit Court Judge James Kingsley on Friday. "She brought a lot of joy and laughter to the family.

"She brought a lot of joy to you," he said, turning to Hubbard, sitting nearby in jailhouse orange with his arms and legs shackled. "We can't have that joy from her anymore because of you."

Moments later, Hubbard was sentenced to 50 to 75 years in prison for the Dec. 2, 2006, death of Lee, 24, of Battle Creek, who was struck and killed with an sport utility vehicle, according to Battle Creek police, which was driven by Hubbard.

The judge cited Hubbard's criminal record, which includes manslaughter, assault, domestic violence, weapons and drug charges, and then called the homicide a "terribly violent crime."

Lee and Hubbard had argued at the home of friends, and witnesses said Lee was walking to her mother's house when Hubbard drove over the curb near Hubbard Street and Roseneath Avenue and struck the young woman on the sidewalk, throwing her about 100 feet. She was dead at the scene.

The SUV rolled over in the street and Hubbard fled. He was caught about a year later in Detroit.

Artis told Hubbard people are angry with him because "after you ran Ebony over, you left her, you didn't give her a chance. You have four kids, but Ebony can never have kids because you killed her."

When given his chance to speak, Hubbard said he wanted to withdraw his plea.

"I was misinformed about the definition of second-degree murder," Hubbard said, reading from a paper. "I don't believe I am guilty of second-degree murder."

He said his lawyer didn't fully explain the plea and hadn't gathered evidence for his defense.

Kingsley denied the request, telling Hubbard the plea had been fully explained to him in court and it was too late to withdraw.

Defense attorney Steven Scharg of Detroit said Hubbard entered his plea to spare Lee's family the pain of a trial.

"He took the matter very seriously," Scharg said. "He didn't want to cause the family any trouble."

He argued there was no evidence of Hubbard's intent to kill Lee.

But Prosecutor John Hallacy said Hubbard ran over Lee and "he fled, leaving a family and a community to suffer.

"This was a brutal act of domestic violence," Hallacy said, arguing Hubbard tried to control Lee and when he could not, he killed her.

"He took her life in the most brutal of fashion and left her to die. He doesn't value human life."

Michael Lee, the victim's brother, read a statement from a family friend, but then told the judge he hoped Hubbard would tell people in prison why he was there.

"He should have to tell them he was in jail for killing a little girl who was not trying to harm him."

"You tell them," Lee said, turning to Hubbard, "you tell them it is for killing a little girl."

Trace Christenson can be reached at 966-0685 or tchrist@battlecr.gannett.com.

Teenager shot after church event in Pontiac

By KORIE WILKINS • FREE PRESS STAFF WRITER • June 16, 2008

A 14-year-old boy remains on life-support this afternoon as police in Pontiac search for the person who shot him.

The boy, in town for two weeks from Alabama visiting his cousins, was near a local church at Cottage and Russell at about midnight on Sunday when there was a fight, said Sgt. Kevin Braddock. Someone pulled out a gun and started shooting, striking the boy twice in the head. No one else was injured.

The boy and several other youth had been at the church for an event earlier Saturday. When the event ended and everyone was leaving the church, some type of altercation took place that continued into the streets. Braddock said the shooter, who is affiliated with a local gang called the "Goon Squad," started shooting. The alleged shooter is not in custody; his name is not being released.

Braddock also declined to give the boy's name. His parents were en route to Pontiac from Alabama today.

The boy was not a part of the fight, Braddock said.

"He was in the wrong place at the wrong time," Braddock said. "Someone started shooting. He got hit."

Detectives are working to solve the case, Braddock said. Anyone with information should call Det. Donald Gracey Jr. at 248-758-3383 or Det. Jeff Buchmann at 248-758-3381. The Pontiac Police Department can also be reached at 248-758-3341.

Sunday, June 15, 2008

Alabama teen in critical condition after shooting in Pontiac

Catherine Jun / The Detroit News

PONTIAC -- A 14-year-old boy is fighting for his life after being shot in the head by another teen thought to be affiliated with a local gang, police said.

Police found the injured teen near the intersection of Cottage and Russell sometime around midnight on Saturday. He had two gunshot wounds to his head and was unresponsive.

Police say a youth event at a nearby church called the Life Worship & Training Center ended some time earlier that evening and when it concluded, an altercation erupted outside. The fight moved into the streets of a nearby neighborhood, where witnesses told police a 16-year-old boy affiliated with the gang "Goon Squad" had a handgun and began shooting. He then fled on foot.

"It was a situation where kids they're having a good time and a bad group of kids attended and they started problems," said Sgt. Kevin Braddock of the Pontiac Police Department.

The teen was transported to an area hospital, where he remains on life support. Police say he is from Alabama and visiting relatives in Pontiac. His parents are en route from Alabama, police said.

Authorities are still trying to determine what caused the altercation and what role the victim played in it.

"It's possible that he was targeted or he was an innocent bystander," Braddock said.

Investigators are asking anyone with information to contact Det. Donald Gracey Jr. at (248) 758-3383 or Det. Jeff Buchmann at (248) 758-3381.

You can reach Catherine Jun at (248) 647-7429 or cjun@detnews.com.

Sunday, June 15, 2008

Editorial: Fathers play crucial role in raising children

Dads don't always get credit for the time they spend on the home front, but fathers in this new generation are no slackers.

The average pop puts in 100 eight-hour "work days" with their families each year, according to Heritage Foundation calculations of federal data.

Part of that time is spent directly caring for children -- reading stories, changing diapers, making dinner.

Part of that time is spent keeping up the house so children have a good environment.

And part of it is spent participating in civic activities like church, which teach children to engage in their communities.

These working fathers are clearly investing time in their children.

That's a good thing, because caring, involved fathers set up their children for success.

Children of active fathers learn more easily and live a more psychologically healthy life. Children whose fathers are involved usually behave better, and are less likely to break the law, drink or do drugs.

As numerous studies and philosophers have noted, good fathers are essential to the success of society.

So on Fathers Day, hats off to dads who take their critical job seriously.



Flint Police to teach girls leadership skills at academy

Posted by Bryn Mickle | The Flint Journal June 15, 2008 19:03PM

FLINT, Michigan -- Makaila Garland wants something better for herself.

Like a good job and the confidence that she can make the right decisions for herself.

"I need better leadership skills," said Makaila, 16.

She's hoping to get that in Lansing this week, where she and about 40 other young women from the area will spend a week focusing on character and responsibility.

"Without those, I'll get trouble," said Makaila.

About 40 teenage girls and their parents gathered early Sunday afternoon at the Flint Police Station before the teenagers were loaded onto a bus and taken to Lansing to attend the Michigan Youth Leadership Academy.

Fred Rett of Flint said he's excited his daughter Alexaundria Rett, 13, is taking part in the academy. It's an opportunity for her to learn something new and develop leadership skills, he said.

"The more experience they get the more they know things don't revolve around Flint," he said.

Fred Rett said it's a chance for a better life and for her to help others as well.

This year marks the first time that an all-female group will attend the Michigan Youth Leadership Academy, said Flint Police Officer Stephen Mayfield.

Mayfield, who serves as the police liaison officer at Northern High School, said the program targets young people between 14 and 16.

The goal is to teach the teens leadership and decision making skills in hopes they will carry over into their dealings at school and in the community, said Mayfield.

"If we can just plant a few positive seeds in the them ... eventually (we will) get positive feedback," said Mayfield, who coordinates the partnership between Flint police, Flint schools and the state police.

Mayfield also hopes it will foster improved relations between the teens and police.

Mayfield and five female Flint police officers will accompany them to the conference at the state police training academy.

"It gives them the opportunity to see us in a different light," said Mayfield.

Alvin Bradford of Flint said he hopes his daughter Brittany Small, 16, will view law enforcement officers as a role model and mentor by participating in the week-long academy.

While at the academy, the teens will learn about interviewing for jobs as well as how to act and dress in the workplace.

Mayfield said the girls also will have some fun. They will get a chance to go swimming, and while at the State Capitol may get to meet Gov. Jennifer Granholm.

They will return Friday afternoon for their graduation.

Girls interested had to go through an application and interview process. Mayfield said about 90 girls applied and only about 40 were picked.

Staff writer Dana DeFever contributed to this report.

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